



### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30pm – 6.15pm

17 March 2011

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Blower, Bradford, Fairbairn, Gee, Grahame, Jeraj, Little, Storie and Wiltshire

Apologies: Councillors Driver and Thomas

#### 1. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2011.

#### 2. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Bridget Buttinger, deputy chief executive, informed members that a series of events were being arranged over the next few months, including Master classes, to enable members to gain a wider perspective of the challenges ahead, for example the budget savings and transformation and efficiency programme.

The chair said that the public consultation on council services in the future should be included on the work programme for May 2011 and that the training of new members and setting the work programme should be included for June 2011. Members also suggested an update on the localism bill and the inclusion of the state of the gullies when revisiting the pothole scrutiny in the autumn.

**RESOLVED** to update the work programme to reflect the suggestions minuted above.

#### 3. QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Russell O'Keefe, head of strategy and programme management presented the report. He said that the format of the report would need to be refined in light of any amendments to the corporate plan and feedback from members and officers.

Jerry Massey, director of regeneration and development and Tracy John, head of neighbourhood and strategic housing informed members that the audit commission were working with the housing service to review the voids process. They provided an explanation of the voids process and improvements made to the service, which were partially achieved through close working with contractors; the involvement of tenants; and multiple viewings so that time was not lost if an offer was declined. In response to members' questions, they said that a tenancy audit/health check involved officers checking tenancies throughout the year, as well as reporting any

issues with the property itself. The audit enabled focused tenancy checks on areas of anti-social behaviour, working with tenants to ensure the properties were up to standard. This had seen a reduction in repairs required. Works and repairs to individual properties continue to be recorded and monitored. The decent homes programme also enabled the council to ensure that homes were fit for purpose. The decent homes standard and expectations of the council and tenants was included in the tenant's handbook. A comprehensive stock assessment had been completed and used to identify an investment programme, which subject to cabinet approval, would look to dispose of properties that were considered financially unviable. Members congratulated officers for the improvements to the service.

In response to a member's question regarding strategic priority SPC 07 – review city's assets, the director of regeneration and development explained that cabinet would be considering the future of the asset management service including the possible option of a joint venture. Norfolk Property Services were currently working with the council on various work-streams and had helped to further develop the capacity of the internal team. This included the development of a strategic asset management plan together with a process to assess the future viability of all non-housing assets. A very robust process had been developed, providing an evidence base on which decisions could be made around re-investment or disposal. Following a suggestion by the chair to include the asset management review on the scrutiny work programme, the director of regeneration and development said that an all member workshop could be organised to provide members with a good understanding of the issue as well as a framework on which to make informed decisions.

In response to members' queries regarding strategic priority SPC 01 – support the economy, the director of regeneration and development explained that the HCA investments, for regeneration projects and new build projects, would generate employment. He also said that the budget of £50,000 for economic business start up support, would remain in reserves because it was currently covered through the LEGI initiative.

In response to a member's question regarding strategic priority SPC 02 – empty shop fronts, the director of regeneration and development explained that the shop front initiatives had been achieved through one-off funding. Although no detailed assessments were carried out, feedback suggested that it was a successful process to maintain ongoing shop fronts.

In response to a question from the chair regarding strategic priority SHN 04 – participatory budgeting, the director of regeneration and development explained that the member task and finish group had reported its recommendations to cabinet. However, expenditure was on hold due to the recent financial announcements by the government.

Members requested clarification on how certain indicators were measured regarding strategic priority SHN 07 – increase investment in council housing. The director of regeneration and development said that he would report back to members on HLPI12 – Q - % of capital programme work quality audits achieving standard.

Members also requested clarification of the intervention target of BV174 of the strategic priority OFA 05 – equality standard. Members were concerned that the

indicators showed an under-reporting of racial incidents. The head of strategy and programme management said that he would report back to members, as well as clarify the specific approach used to measure BV175 (racial incidents resulting in further action) and BV2b (duty to promote race equality).

In response to a member's question regarding the carbon management plan, strategic priority OFA 04 – NICC, the head of strategy and programme management explained that the NICC report, considered by cabinet in November 2010, would be used as a basis to develop the environmental strategy. The environmental strategy, which would be signed off during summer 2011, would be considered by the sustainable development panel, as well as subjected to various consultations including an event in June 2011.

In response to members' questions regarding strategic priority OC 01 – average council tax increase, Barry Marshall, the head of finance explained that the high levels of deprivation within Norwich made it difficult to collect council tax. The council would pursue people in debt because it had a duty to do so.

In response to a member's question regarding strategic priority OC 04 – level 3 use of resources score, the deputy chief executive explained that the use of resources score had been replaced with a value for money assessment. The broader assessment would form part of the annual audit letter. The head of strategy and programme management informed members that the 100% figure reflected the council's completion of the use of resources activities at the time of its abolition.

Members requested clarification on how certain indicators were measured regarding strategic priority OC 03 – two star landlord service. The director of regeneration and development said that he would report back to members on HLP19 – Q - % reduction in antisocial behaviour cases, including what the figures meant and the scale of the numbers involved. He informed members that the audit commission had commented that effective processes were in place.

Councillor Waters, portfolio holder for resources, performance and shared services, introduced the proposal for an annual performance review report. It would help to identify areas for improvement; identify priorities for the coming year; and incorporate comments of the scrutiny committee. A member said that if the scrutiny committee were to move closer to the corporate decision making process, clearer information would be required within reports and members would need to receive appropriate training. The deputy chief executive said that the scrutiny work programme would provide clear direction and would influence the development and delivery of appropriate members briefings, training and the opportunity to ask questions.

Members congratulated the work around voids; were pleased with the position on climate change; the relationship between HCA and affordable housing; and the good work of the planning committee.

Members suggested that further focus could be given to the reporting of hate crimes; that although there had been impressive target hitting with regards to recycling, a seamless process was required including the provision of information to residents to avoid confusion; and housing repairs of contracts already re-let.

There had been a relatively poor performance against the reduction of antisocial behaviour and members proposed that this should be included on the scrutiny work programme; as well as the asset management review.

The chair thanked officers for the report and asked members to feedback any comments regarding the style of the report to officers. Members suggested that the report should include more qualitative data to set the context. The director of regeneration and development said that the aim would be to report by exception, in an attempt to reduce the volume of paperwork and to focus on areas of concern. If any specific areas were identified, members were asked to inform the scrutiny officer so that officers could prepare in advance.

**RESOLVED** to –

- (1) ask the head of neighbourhood and strategic housing to provide members with a copy of the tenants handbook;
- (2) ask the director of regeneration and development to provide clarification to members of how the indicators are measured for HLPI12 and HLPI19, as well as the scale of numbers involved regarding anti-social behaviour cases;
- (3) ask the head of strategy and programme management to provide clarification to members of the intervention target for BV174 and how the indicators are measured for BV175 and BV2b; and
- (4) consider the inclusion of the asset management review and work against antisocial behaviour on the work programme for review.

**4. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REVIEW**

Steve Goddard, scrutiny officer, introduced the report. The chair presented the report, which provided a review of past and proposed activities, but also a guide to the purpose of scrutiny; the role of members, officers and the public; and how scrutiny reviews were carried out. She also drew members' attention to the proposed tracking system which would be used to follow through recommendations and actions resulting from the scrutiny committee.

In response to a member's suggestion to use smaller scrutiny groups rather than full committee meetings, the scrutiny officer said that the future role of the scrutiny committee and how it would be resourced would need to be considered at a later date once the outcome of the council's transformation and efficiency programme was known and in the context of changes that may be required once the localism bill becomes legislation.

**RESOLVED** to adopt the annual scrutiny review and to recommend that the council adopt the annual scrutiny review.

**\*5. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of items 17-24 below on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**\*6. EXEMPLAR FIRST PHASE – THREESCORE DEVELOPMENT;  
PROCUREMENT PROCESS TO SECURE DEVELOPMENT PARTNER**

The vice chair informed members of the outcome of the procurement process and the involvement of the task and finish group. The director of regeneration and development explained that there had been a week long assessment process. On 28 February 2011 representatives of the HCA and city council met the three developers and asked them a number of set questions. During the afternoon the scrutiny task and finish group met to consider the written submissions. Arising from these two events additional information was requested from the developers. During the remainder of the week, a panel of officers from the HCA and city council carried out the formal evaluation and selection process based on the criteria contained in the tender documentation. The outcome of the selection process was reported to cabinet on 16 March 2011.

**RESOLVED** to note the update.

CHAIR